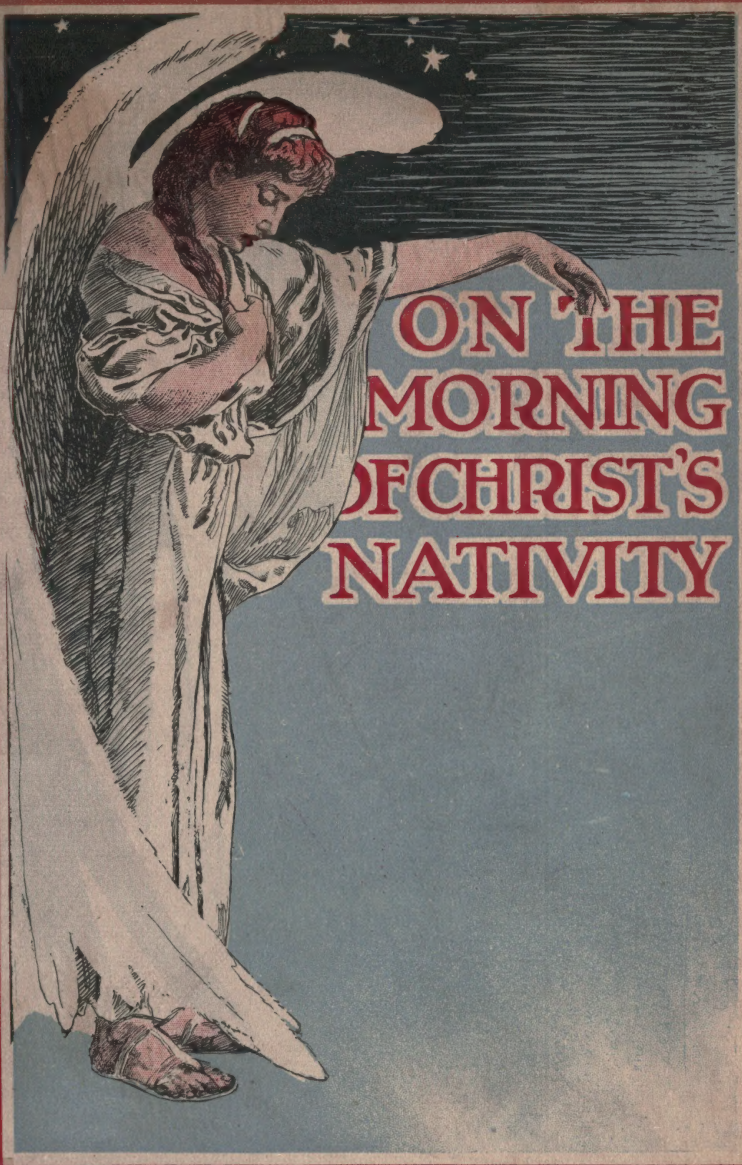
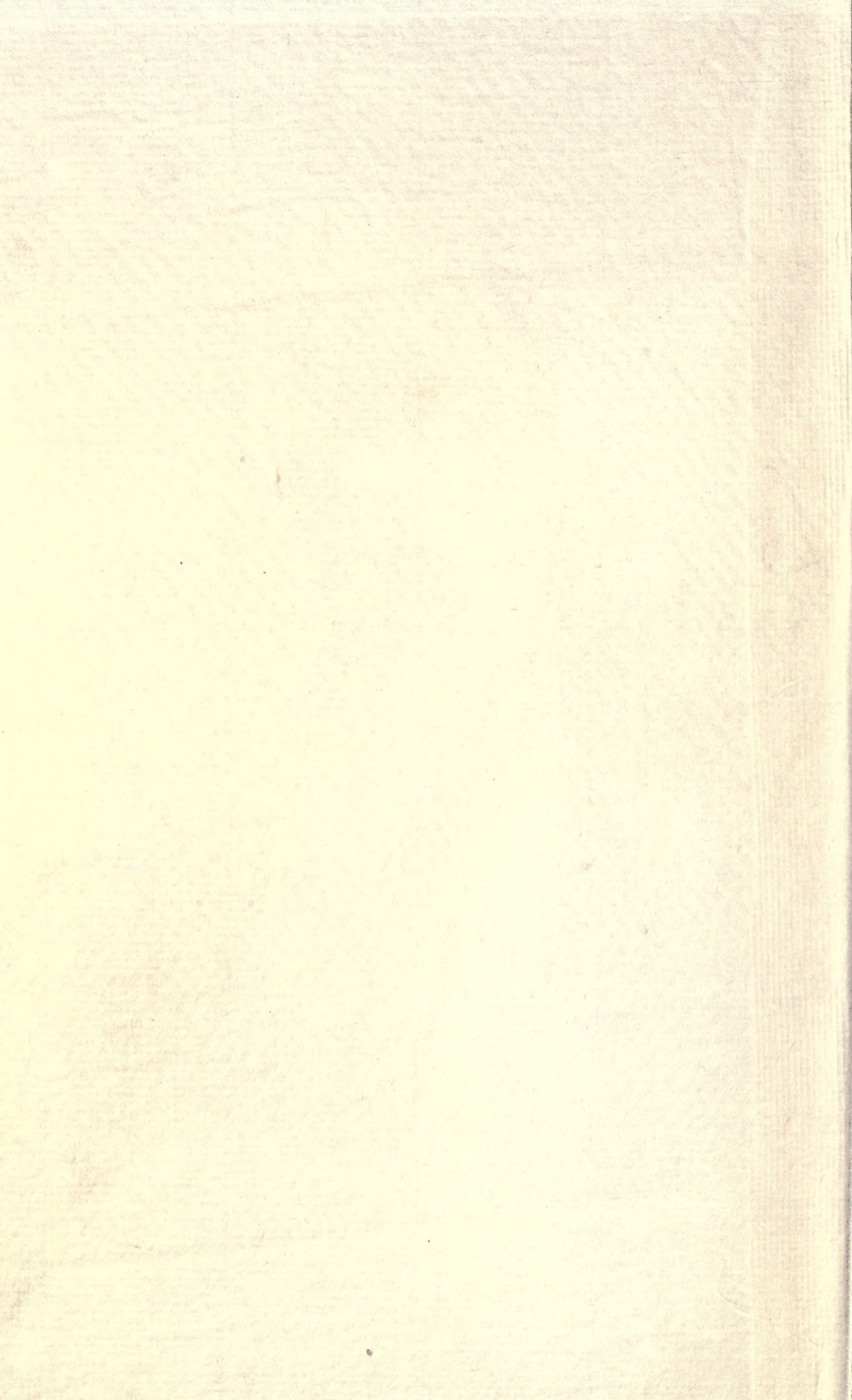


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ON THE MORNING OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY

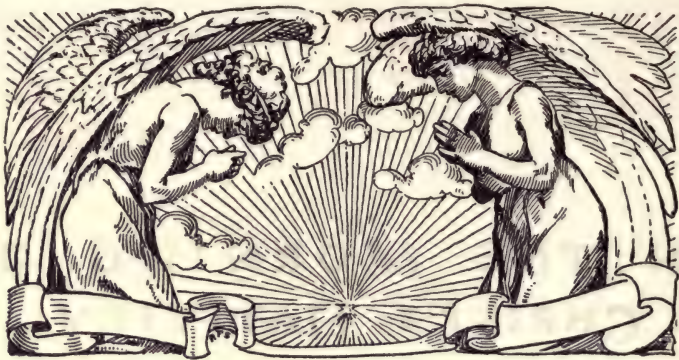
An Ode by
JOHN MILTON

Designed and Hand-lettered by
RALPH FLETCHER SEYMOUR

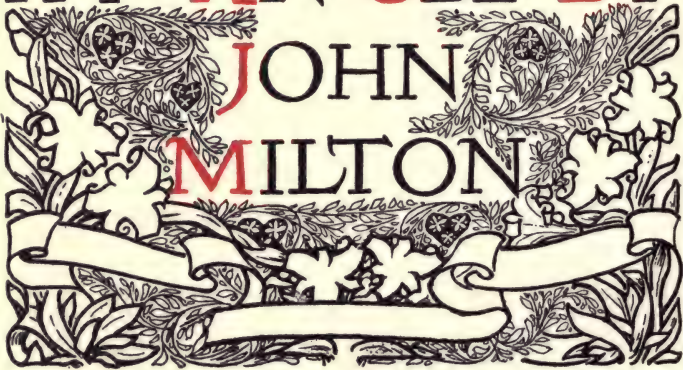


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ON THE MORNING OF
CHRIST'S NATIVITY



ON THE MORNING
OF CHRIST'S NATIV-
ITY—AN ODE BY
JOHN
MILTON





THIS IS THE MONTH
AND THIS THE
HAPPY MORN,
WHEREIN THE
SON OF HEAVEN'S
ETERNAL KING,

Of wedded maid and virgin
mother born,


Our full redemption from
above did bring;

For so the holy sages once
did sing,


That he our deadly for-
feit should release,

And with his Father work us
a perpetual peace.




ON THE MORNING OF 

II

HAT glorious form, that
light unsufferable,
And that far-beaming blaze
of majesty,
Wherewith he wont at Heaven's
high council-table
To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,
Helaid aside; and, here with us to be,
Forsook the courts of everlasting day,
And chose with us a darksome house
of mortal clay.

III

AY, heavenly Muse, shall
not thy sacred vein
Afford a present to the In-
fant God?
Hast thou no verse, no hymn, or
solemn strain,
To welcome him to this his new abode,



CHRIST'S NATIVITY

Now, while the heaven, by the sun's
team untrod,
Hath took no print of the approach-
ing light,
And all the spangled host keep watch
in squadrons bright?

IV

SEE how from far upon the
eastern road
The star-led wizards haste
with odours sweet;
Oh! run, prevent them with thy hum-
ble ode,
And lay it lowly at his blessed feet;
Have thou the honour first thy Lord
to greet,
And join thy voice unto the angel choir,
From out his secret altar touched with
hallowed fire.



THE HYMN



IT was the winter wild,
While the Heaven-born child
All meanly wrapped in the
rude manger lies;
Nature in awe to him
Had doffed her gaudy trim,
With her great Master so to sym-
pathize:
It was no season then for her
To wanton with the sun, her lusty
paramour.

On Christ's Nativity

II

ONLY, with speeches fair
She wooes the gentle air
To hide her guilty front
with innocent snow,
And on her naked shame,
Pollute with sinful blame,
The saintly veil of maiden
white to throw;
Confounded that her Maker's eyes
Should look so near upon her foul
deformities.

III

BUT he, her fears to cease,
Sent down the meek-eyed Peace;
She, crowned with olive green,
came softly sliding
Down through the turning sphere,
His ready harbinger,
With turtle wing the amor-
ous clouds dividing;
And, waving wide her myrtle wand,
She strikes an universal peace through
sea and land.

On the Morning

IV

NO war, or battle's sound,
Was heard the world around;
The idle spear and shield
were high up hung;
The hookèd chariot stood,
Unstained with hostile blood;
The trumpet spake not to the
armèd throng;
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovereign
Lord was by.

V

BUT peaceful was the night
Wherein the Prince of Light
His reign of peace upon the
earth began:
The winds, with wonder whist,
Smoothly the waters kissed,
Whispering new joys to the
mild ocean,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While birds of calm sit brooding on
the charmèd wave.

of Christ's Nativity

VI

THE stars, with deep amaze,
Stand fixed in steadfast gaze,
Bending one way their pre-
cious influence,
And will not take their flight
For all the morning light,
Or Lucifer that often warned
them thence;
But in their glimmering orbs did glow,
Until their Lord himself bespake, and
bid them go.

VII

AND, though the shady gloom
Had given day her room,
The sun himself withheld his
wonted speed,
And hid his head for shame,
As his inferior flame
The new enlightened world
no more should need;
He saw a greater Sun appear
Than his bright throne or burning
axle-tree could bear.



VIII

THE shepherds on the lawn,
Or ere the point of dawn,
Sat simply chatting in a rus-
tic row;
Full little thought they then,
That the mighty Pan
Was kindly come to live
with them below;
Perhaps their loves, or else their sheep,
Was all that did their silly thoughts
so busy keep.

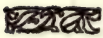
On Christ's Nativity

IX

WHEN such music sweet
Their hearts and ears did greet,
As never was by mortal
finger strook,
Divinely-warbled voice
Answering the stringèd noise,
As all their souls in blissful
rapture took;
The air, such pleasure loth to lose,
With thousand echoes still prolongs
each heavenly close.

X

NATURE, that heard such sound,
Beneath the hollow round
Of Cynthia's seat, the airy
region thrilling,
Now was almost won
To think her part was done,
And that her reign had here
its last fulfilling;
She knew such harmony alone
Could hold all Heaven and Earth in
happier union.

On the Morning 

XI

AT last surrounds their sight
A globe of circular light,
That with long beams the
shame-faced Night arrayed;
The helmèd Cherubim,
And sworded Seraphim,
Are seen in glittering ranks
with wings displayed,
Harping in loud and solemn choir,
With unexpressive notes, to Heaven's
new-born Heir.

XII

SUCH music (as 'tis said)
Before was never made,
But when of old the Sons of
Morning sung,
While the Creator great
His constellations set,
And the well-balanced world
on hinges hung,
And cast the dark foundations deep,
And bid the weltering waves their
oozy channel keep.

USE OF Christ's Nativity

XIII

RING out, ye crystal Spheres!
Once bless our human ears
(If ye have power to touch
our senses so),
And let your silver chime
Move in melodious time;
And let the base of Heaven's
deep organ blow,
And with your ninefold harmony
Make up full consort to the angelic
symphony.

XIV

FOR if such holy song
Enwrap our fancy long,
Time will run back, and fetch
the age of gold;
And speckled Vanity
Will sicken soon and die,
And leprous Sin will melt
from earthly mold;
And Hell itself will pass away,
And leave her dolorous mansions to
the peering Day.

On the Morning 

XV

YEA, Truth and Justice then
Will down return to men,
Orbed in a rainbow; and,
like glories wearing,
Mercy will sit between,
Throned in celestial sheen,
With radiant feet the tissued
clouds down steering;
And Heaven, as at some festival,
Will open wide the gates of her high
palace hall.

XVI

BUT wisest Fate says No,
This must not yet be so,
The Babe lies yet in smiling
infancy,
That on the bitter cross
Must redeem our loss,
So both himself and us to
glorify;
Yet first, to those ychained in sleep,
The wakeful trump of doom must thun-
der through the deep.

OF Christ's Nativity

XVII

WITH such a horrid clang
As on Mount Sinai rang,
While the red fire and smoul-
dering clouds outbrake;
The agèd Earth aghast,
With terror of that blast,
Shall from the surface to the
center shake;
When at the world's last session,
The dreadful Judge in middle air
shall spread his throne.

XVIII

AND then at last our bliss
Full and perfect is,
But now begins; for from this
happy day
The old Dragon under ground,
In straiter limits bound,
Not half so far casts his usur-
pèd sway,
And, wroth to see his kingdom fail,
Swindges the scaly horror of his folded
tail.



XIX

THE oracles are dumb,
No voice or hideous hum
Runs through the arched
roof in words deceiving.
Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine,
With hollow shriek the steep
of Delphos leaving.
No nightly trance, or breathed spell,
Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the
prophetic cell.

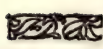
On Christ's Nativity

XX

THE lonely mountains o'er
And the resounding shore,
A voice of weeping heard and
loud lament;
From haunted spring, and dale
Edged with poplar pale,
The parting Genius is with
sighing sent:
With flower-inwoven tresses torn
The Nymphs in twilight shade of
tangled thickets mourn.

XXI

IN consecrated earth,
And on the holy hearth,
The Lars and Lemures moan
with midnight plaint:
In urns, and altars round,
A drear and dying sound
Affrights the Flamens at their
service quaint:
And the chill marble seems to sweat,
While each peculiar Power forgoes his
wonted seat.

On the Morning 

XXII

PEUR and Baälim
Forsake their temples dim,
With that twice-battered god
of Palestine;
And moonèd Ashtaroth,
Heaven's queen and mother both,
Now sits not girt with taper's
holy shine;
The Lybic Hammon shrinks his horn;
In vain the Tyrian maids their wounded
Thammuz mourn.

XXIII

AND sullen Moloch, fled,
Hath left in shadows dread
His burning idol all of blackest
hue;
In vain, with cymbals' ring,
They call the grisly king,
In dismal dance about the fur-
nace blue;
The brutish gods of Nile as fast,
Isis and Orus, and the dog Anubis,
haste.

OF Christ's Nativity

XXIV

NOR is Osiris seen
In Memphian grove or green,
Trampling the unshowered
grass with lowings loud;
Nor can he be at rest
Within his sacred chest,
Nought but profoundest Hell
can be his shroud!
In vain with timbreled anthems dark
The sable-stolèd sorcerers bear his
worshipped ark.

XXV

HE feels from Judah's land
The dreaded infant's hand,
The rays of Bethlehem
blind his dusky eyn;
Nor all the gods beside
Longer dare abide,
Nor Typhon huge ending in
snaky twine,
Our Babe, to show his Godhead true,
Can in His swaddling bands control
the damnèd crew.



XXVI

SO when the sun in bed,
Curtailed with cloudy red,
Pillows his chin upon an orient
wave,
The flocking shadows pale
Troop to the infernal jail,
Each fettered ghost slips to his
several grave;
And the yellow-skirted fays
Fly after the night-steeds, leaving
their moon-loved maze.

On Christ's Nativity

XXVII

BUT see, the Virgin blest
Hath laid her Babe to rest;
Time is our tedious song should
here have ending;
Heaven's youngest-teemèd star
Hath fixed her polished car,
Her sleeping Lord with hand-
made lamp attending;
And all about the courtly stable
Bright-harnessed angels sit in order
serviceable.



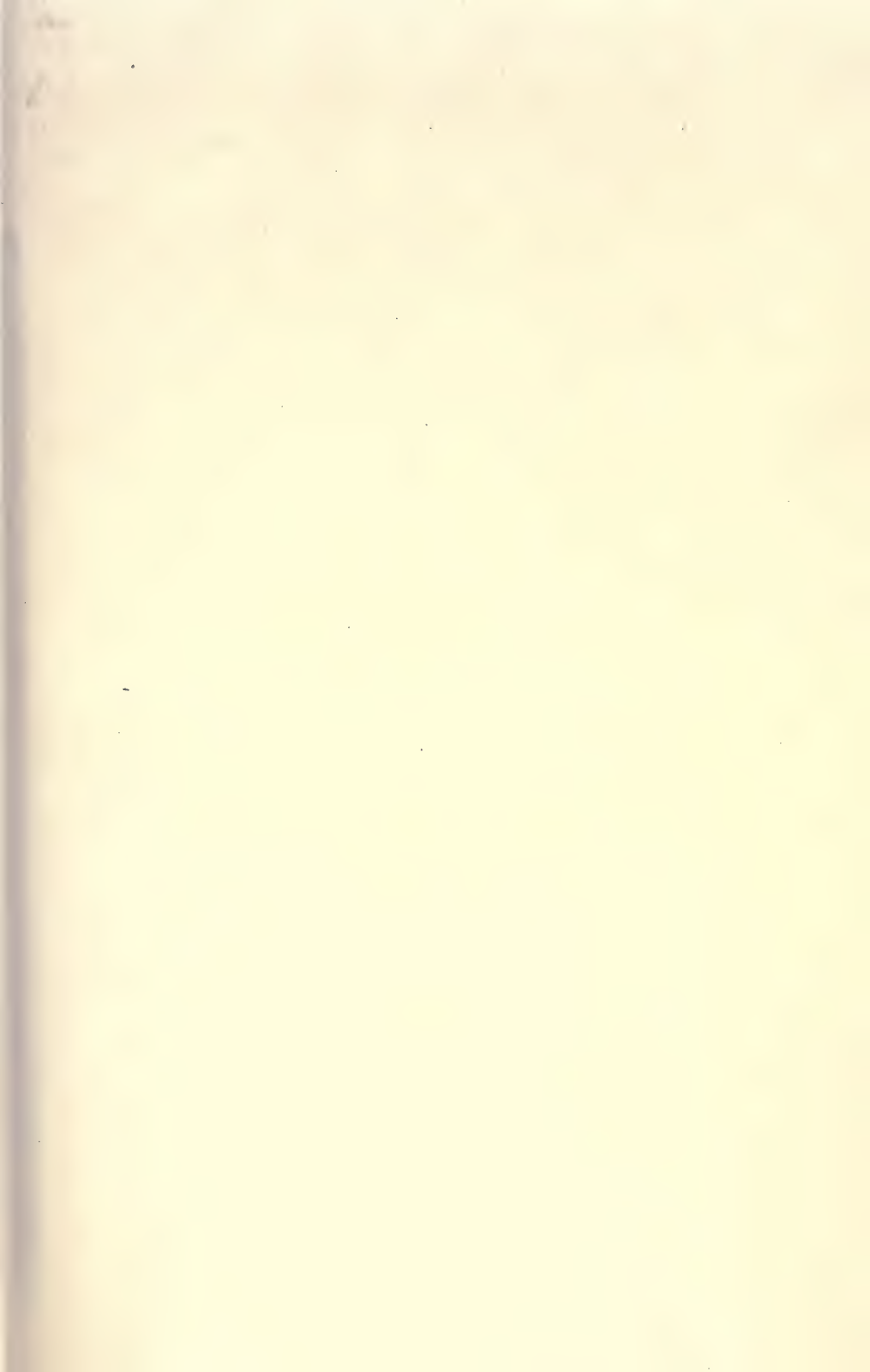


HERE ENDS THIS POEM: TRULY BY ITS
SONG OUR NOBLE POET HAS ENLARGED
OUR JOY. AS HE HAS WRITTEN,—

“Of music, and ethereal mirth
Wherewith the stage of Air and Earth did ring,
And joyous news of heavenly Infants' birth
My muse with Angels did divide to sing.”



VALE QUI LEGIS





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On the morning of Christ's
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